DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 764 SO 013 043

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TITLE	Moral Dilemmas of Young Adults.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Sep 80
GRANT	NIE-G-79-0021
NOTE	28p.; For a related document, see SO 013 042.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Students; Females; Longitudinal Studies; Males; *Moral Issues; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Social Science Research; *Terminal Students; *Young Adults

ABSTRACT

This study describes moral dilemmas that young adults (ages 18-24) formulate spontaneously and examines the relationship between these dilemmas and the subjects' environment and scores on a standardized test. Fifty-two subjects were tested both in 1976 and 1978, creating 104 subject-oriented dilemmas. Thirty-two were in college, 17 were not, and three were in college at the first testing but had dropped out by the last testing. Participants completed a Defining Issues Test (DIT), Comprehension of Moral Attitudes Test, Law and Order Test of Political Attitudes, a written moral dilemma test, and a short personal questionnaire. At the end of the tests, students were asked to describe their own moral dilemmas. The most important findings of the study were that the moral dilemmas that young adults write about are extremely diverse and changeable over time. Subjects described their dilemmas from three perspectives: social issues such as abortion, gay rights, the arms race; personal problems; and general causes of human conflict such as greedy people and corrupt governments. Subjects with more education tended to relate slightly more social dilemmas. Females gave proportionally more personal and social dilemmas; males recorded proportionally more general cause dilemmas. A comparison with the DIT scores did not show that any of the dilemma types were developmentally more advanced. (Author/KC)

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Moral Dilemmas of Young Adults

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September, 1980

SP 013 043

Project Report #1
Higher Education and Cognitive - Social Development Project
Department of Social, Psychological, and Philosophical Foundations of Education

Funded by a grant from the National Institute of Education (NIE-G-79-0021):
Mark L. Davison, Principal Investigator

Characteristics of Moral Dilemmas Written by Young Adults

Several thousand studies now exist on the development of moral judgment (for instance, see Rest, in press, for overview) and virtually all of these studies are based on subjects' responses to moral dilemmas designed by the experimenter. Very few studies have used dilemmas originated by the subjects themselves or dilemmas naturally arising in the life experiences of the subjects: Haan, Smith, and Block (1968; see also Haan, 1975) studied moral reasoning about an actual student protest situation; Gilligan (1977) studied women's moral reasoning about an impending abortion decision; Crisham (1979) studied moral dilemmas arising in the professional life of nurses. Several experimenters have deliberately chosen moral dilemmas that are presumed to represent typical life experiences of the subjects (e.g., Bull, 1969; Damon, 1977; Piaget, 1932/1965). However, Yussen (1977) is perhaps the only one to ask subjects to generate moral dilemmas on their own and to examine characteristics of these subject-originated dilemmas in comparison to experimenter-originated dilemmas.

Many reasons exist for the prevalent use of experimenter-originated dilemmas in studying moral reasoning. For one, experimenter-originated dilemmas are carefully constructed to produce a variety of scorable responses from subjects. If a dilemma is usually answered by a cliché that is difficult to probe, or if a dilemma elicits a uniform socially-prescribed response from most subjects, then that dilemma is not useful to researchers. Researchers attempt to construct dilemmas that elicit diverse responses (without badgering the subject with too much probing) which can be fit into theoretically meaningful taxonomies. Subjects do not have these objectives in mind, and have not piloted their dilemmas on other subjects to select those dilemmas which "work." For instance, Kohlberg and colleagues over the years have devised about 20 dilemmas on which data was collected and analyzed, but the dilemmas that are

recurrently used (such as the "Heinz and the drug" dilemma) are those that reliably elicit scorable responses.

Second, experimenter-originated responses can be "standardized" in the sense that the same story elements can be presented to all subjects in a study. There are two advantages to such standardization: (a) the development of scoring guides for a dilemma is exceedingly complex and time-consuming. Many decisions in developing a scoring taxonomy are informed by empirical data--a method referred to as "bootstrapping" by the Kohlberg group (see Colby, 1978; Colby, Gibbs, Kohlberg, & Speicher-Dubin, Note 1; Kohlberg, 1976). Therefore, constructing a new scoring guide for every dilemma that subjects themselves originate would not only be a tedious task, but one which would have to be done without a data base (or the possibility of "bootstrapping"). (b) Furthermore, even if a scoring taxonomy could be constructed for each subject-originated dilemma, comparing responses to one dilemma with responses to a different dilemma would be problematic. Many studies show that varying the elements in a moral story affects the cognitive structures used by subjects to organize an answer (e.g., Keasey, 1978; Liebermann, 1971; Magowan & Lee, 1970; McGeorge, 1974; Rest, 1979)--sometimes even seemingly trivial differences in stories change the developmental scores. Therefore, to the degree that subject-originated dilemmas were not identical in every respect, scoring of the responses (or answers) to them would confound subject-differences with story differences.

Third, since experimenter-originated dilemmas can be standardized and have a past history of use in previous studies, a record can be established about the properties of the scores so produced. And so if a number of previous studies have shown that subject responses to standard dilemmas (scored in prescribed ways) have good short term test-retest reliability, good internal consistency, almost exceptionless longitudinal trends, discriminant validity, etc., then we have some confidence that

the scores of new subjects to those dilemmas are meaningful indications of a person's moral judgment development. If, on the otherhand, each subject-originated dilemma is unique, then previous studies cannot be used to give us confidence in the interpretability of our analysis of the scores.

A fourth advantage to experimenter-originated dilemmas is that we can control the topic-area of discussion. As we shall see in the findings of the present study, subjects are not always clear about what is a moral dilemma in contrast to non-moral dilemmas, and some subjects mention almost anything that is bothering them. If one wanted to study whatever concerns young adults, this may be fine; but if one wants to study moral thinking, then some structure in circumscribing the problem domain seems necessary.

Despite the advantages of experimenter-originated dilemmas, many problems (or at least questions) arise. How do we know that the characterizations of subjects' responses to experimenter-originated dilemmas bears any relation to the moral thinking of subjects in real life decision making? Is moral judgment research largely based on responses to artificial problems? Are there other dilemmas than our current "standard" set of dilemmas that would have been more representative of the real life moral thinking of our subjects? If we ask subjects to describe a moral dilemma in their own life, what kinds of situations do they describe, how uniform or diverse are the situations, how consistent over time are subjects in nominating their own dilemmas and how do these dilemmas relate to the subject's milieu and developmental scores (assessed by using the standard, experimenter-originated dilemmas)? These are the major questions that motivated the present study.

Yussen (1977) has described moral dilemmas generated by adolescent subjects in the 7th, 9th, and 12th grades. In comparison to Kohlberg dilemmas, the subject-originated dilemmas referred more to problems among friends and interpersonal relations; furthermore, the age and sex of the child was associated with some characteristics

of the dilemmas (but in ways too complex to summarize here). The present study continues the central purpose of the Yussen study, namely to offer a descriptive content analysis of moral dilemmas that subjects formulate spontaneously. The present study differs, however, in several regards: (a) Rather than adolescents, the present study is concerned with young adults, all out of high school (ages ranging from 18 to 24 years). (b) The present study is interested in the relation of subject-originated dilemmas to the subject's milieu--namely, subjects in college (the "book world?") versus subjects not in college (the "real world?"). (c) Also, the present study relates subject-originated dilemmas to developmental scores on a standard experimenter-originated instrument (the Defining Issues Test). (d) The present study was longitudinal. Subjects were tested on the Defining Issues Test and then asked to describe their own moral dilemma both in 1976 and in 1978. Comparisons between testings indicated how stable the content of the subject's "own dilemma" was, and how it changed as a function of other changes in the life of the subject.

A methodological interest of the present study was to see if one or two dilemmas would be so frequently mentioned by the subjects that these dilemmas could be regarded as "representative, real life" dilemmas of young adults (at least for this sample). Further, it was hoped that asking subjects to explain their reasoning about their own dilemmas would provide enough information for the beginning construction of a scoring taxonomy for these dilemmas.

Method

Subjects. 52 subjects from an ongoing longitudinal study (Rest, Cooper, Coder, Masanz, & Anderson, 1974; Rest, 1979) were tested both in 1976 and 1978, and thus 104 instances of subject-originated dilemmas constitute the basic material for this study. 32 subjects were in college during this period, 17 were not in college, and 3 were in college at one testing but had dropped out at the other testing. Subjects

classified as "not in college" were working without graduating from college, in the military, housewives, or unemployed. Originally 41 subjects were from a residential area in St. Paul/Minneapolis and 11 were from a small town in northern Minnesota, but over the two years many subjects had moved around, mostly in-state. 26 subjects in 1976 were 18-19 years, the rest were between 20 and 22 years. 32 subjects were female, 20 were male. 14 of the subjects were married at the time of the study. Subjects were volunteers in a longitudinal study begun in 1972 and contacted at two year intervals since then. For additional information about this sample, see Rest, 1979.

Measures and Procedures. At two year intervals these subjects have completed a questionnaire package including the Defining Issues Test ("DIT"), Comprehension of Moral Concepts test, "Law and Order" Test of political attitudes, a modified Kohlberg-type written test, and a short questionnaire on the subjects' current activities, job and marital status. Each of these measures is discussed in detail in the cited references. This entire test package requires about two hours to complete. Subjects are contacted by mail and if they consent, are sent the questionnaire by mail, and are paid $10.00. For the present study, only DIT scores were analyzed because that has been the major measure in this research. As in most DIT research to date, the P score was used as the major variable, which can be interpreted as the relative importance that subjects give to Principled moral considerations (Stages 5 and 6) in making a moral decision.

A description of the 6 DIT dilemmas is as follows: (1) Heinz's wife is dying of cancer and a drug which may save her is sold by a druggist charging an exorbitant price. Should Heinz steal the drug? (2) Students feel that the university administrators are furthering the war in Vietnam by aiding the army ROTC program on campus. Should the students protest by taking over the administration building? (3) A man had escaped from prison many years ago and in the meantime had become a model citizen. Should a woman who happens to recognize the man as the escaped prisoner report him

to the authorities? (4) A doctor must decide whether to accede to a request to die from a woman who is terminally ill and in great pain. (5) A manager of a gas station must decide whether to hire a minority employee who is qualified but objectionable to some customers. (6) A high school principal must decide whether to close down a student newspaper which has published material that is objectionable to some parents.

Added to the end of the test package was an additional page that asked subjects to provide a description of their own moral dilemmas. Instructions were as follows:

> You have now given us your reactions to many moral dilemmas and social problems, and we are most appreciative of your efforts. The dilemmas that have been presented in this questionnaire, however, may or may not be similar to ones that have been of most concern to you, or ones that you have struggled with in your own life. In the space below please describe a social problem or moral dilemma that seems important to you and that you have spent some time thinking about. Please indicate what the alternative solutions were that you considered, what were the main issues in making a decision, and what your present position is regarding the solution of the problem. (If you need more space, please enclose additional pages.)

Several characteristics of this method of collecting information about a subject's "own dilemma" should be noted. For one, since this information was requested at the end of a lengthy questionnaire, the subjects may have been fatigued and tired with thinking and writing--the brevity and terseness of many responses suggest this. Originally I had hoped to be able to stage score these discussions, but the material is much too skimpy to attempt this. Second, the DIT dilemmas provide examples of what was meant by "moral dilemmas and social problems." In some earlier pilot work it was found that the term "moral dilemma" had special connotations for some subjects, meaning, as one subject replied, "drugs and sex." Therefore, the more expansive phrase "moral dilemmas and social problems" was used so as not to suggest to subjects only dilemmas about drugs and sex, as the examples of the dilemmas used on the DIT would also suggest. Third, it should be noted that any procedure which asks subjects to furnish examples of their own moral dilemmas has unknown correspondence to the

actual day-by-day concerns of the subjects: Subjects may not be very accurate in recalling their own dilemmas, they may not recognize some problems as moral dilemmas or be able to talk about it, they may not want to disclose that information, they may be overly influenced by certain demand characteristics in this testing procedure. Short of following subjects around and observing their lives, any self-report procedure must be regarded as preliminary.

Since the purpose of this study was explorative and descriptive, no scheme for scoring the subject-originated dilemmas existed beforehand, and a descriptive scheme was derived from the 104 responses.

Results

Describing the subject-originated dilemmas. Table 1 presents the subject-originated dilemmas described so as to preserve the essential circumstances of the dilemma (for instance, "women's rights: sex stereotyping" is distinguished from "women's rights: care of rape victims" because the dilemmas refer to quite different sets of circumstances even though on an abstract level both deal with women's rights). Although the concrete particulars of the subjects' dilemmas are lost in this classification, perhaps the essential features are retained. In any case, one of the striking findings is that even at this level of abstraction, there is such a diversity of dilemmas mentioned (52 are listed). It is obvious that even in this relatively homogeneous sample of subjects who have all been furnished the same example dilemmas in the DIT, there is no single dilemma type that stands out (even the most frequently mentioned dilemma type, "abortion," accounts for only 15% of the dilemmas coded). On the basis of this sample one could not recommend a "representative" dilemma for young adults which captures what they are generally concerned about because such diversity exists. Also, there is no reason to expect that this list would generalize to other samples tested at other times.

Insert Table 1 about here

One finds some counterparts to DIT dilemmas in the subjects own dilemmas. Like the DIT's "Doctor" story, several subjects described "mercy killing" dilemmas. Like the DIT's "Webster" story, some subjects mentioned dilemmas dealing with minority rights although not focused on job opportunity but on housing and education. Like the "Escaped Prisoner" dilemma, one subject described punishment issues but focused on capital punishment. Like the "Newspaper" dilemma, some subjects were concerned about the "right to speak out for unpopular causes" although not through newspapers. On the basis of Table 1 data, one cannot claim that DIT dilemmas depict the most typical concerns of young adults, however, the researcher who wants to improve the representativeness of dilemmas over those used in the DIT or Kohlberg procedure would not find much support for any other set of dilemmas either.

Table 1 groups the dilemmas into "social policy issues," personal problems," and "general pronouncements." Subjects seemed to have different perspectives about how to answer the request for a dilemma. Some subjects mentioned "social policy issues," that is, problems of wide-spread concern that require some agreement among people and concerted group effort to solve--for instance, policies for regulating the medical use of life support machines, policies on busing to achieve school integration of the races, the question of whether to develop the neutron bomb. Social policy issues are dilemmas that are debated in a public forum and which usually involve social institutions or social structures.

In contrast, "personal problems" are problems posed from an individual decision-maker's perspective. They are typically of the form, "this is my situation, what should I do?" For instance, several subjects said they were trying to decide whether

or not to move in with their girlfriends/boyfriends without being married. The dilemma was not discussed in terms of a general social practice but whether it made sense in their particular cases or not. As another instance, one subject talked about interfaith dating--but the problem focused on her particular difficulty in finding suitable young men: "Everyone worthwhile I meet is either into drugs, smoking or liquor, immature, insecure, or going to grad school out East or West." Other dilemmas grouped under "personal problems" were descriptions of jolting first hand experiences (e.g., witnessing a suicide, being in a car accident, being fired from a job) in which the focus is on the individual's upsetting experience.

A third grouping, "general pronouncements on what's wrong with people, society, or human nature," is more difficult to capsule than the other two. It is disntinguished from "personal problems" in not being focused on some particular personal decision or specific jolting experience; it is distinguished from "social policy issues" in not being focused on some particular program, institutional structure, or social policy. Some excerpts may convey the highly general character of these discussions:

> (1) My biggest gripe against society is that people don't get along with one another.... People always seem to be bickering with one another.... The only solution to the problem that I see is for every person to try a little harder to get along with his fellow man.
>
> (2) As we all know, our nation (U.S.A.) was founded on a God fearing foundation where our cornerstone was the Word (Bible) .... We took that cause for granted and then we abused it by taking the shield (protection) of the Bill of Rights and used it to tie the hands of the law.
>
> (3) Our government is a huge problem for everyone. It affects everyone in everything. What I would like to see is action, right or wrong, not hear words and get a newsletter at election time ....

Although the excerpts above may seem vague and simplistic, some of the discussions scored as "general pronouncements" were quite complex, as for example:

> (4) It is quite interesting for me to notice that such great problems as war, poverty and unemployment, fascism, racism, etc. are all a result of ignorance about the moment by moment obligation we have to pay attention to the world around us. When people become self-centered and egocentric, morality becomes just another decision to be made on the basis of the individual's mindset--

> the ego is the judge. When I consider the great variety of different prejudices and the strength with which people hold them, it becomes clear that if morality is to be an important concept which guides behavior, it had better come from somewhere besides our own judgment .... The moral dilemma facing the world today is very broad. It is the need for the discovery of the source of morality in the world; and attentiveness, not conscious judgment, will help us find it.

It should be noted that each of these three types of dilemmas could have been suggested by taking the DIT previously. Many people see the DIT dilemmas as raising social policy issues such as civil disobedience, euthanisia, racial prejudice, free speech, and questions about the limits of laws and the criminal justice system. On the otherhand, each DIT dilemma is presented as a problem for a specific person (or group of people) in a specific setting, and hence subjects who gave "personal problem" dilemmas could justifiably contend that their dilemmas are following the same format except describing one of their own problems instead of somebody else's problem. Thirdly, those subjects who gave "general pronouncement" dilemmas could refer to many DIT items which give highly generalized statements and considerations (e.g., "What values are going to be the basis for governing how people act towards each other?" "How would the will of the people and the public good best be served?" "Whether the greedy and competitive capitalistic system ought to be completely abandoned"). Therefore, some aspect or another of the DIT could have suggested to subjects to give any of these three types of dilemmas.

In only eight instances out of the 104 (3 in 1976, 5 in 1978) subjects said they did not have any moral dilemmas or could not think of any. It is unclear whether this represents a blissfully uncomplicated life, moral insensitivity, confusion about the instructions, or merely exhaustion after a long questionnaire.

The amount and quality of writing was very uneven. While some subjects did comply with the instructions and did give pro and con considerations and their reasoning for a decision, many did not. Few subjects provided enough discussion of their basic premises to attempt stage scoring. As Table 1 indicates, the problems described by some subjects has an unclear moral focus (e.g., the problem in finding suitable dating partners).

Consistency over time in "own dilemmas". With descriptions from subjects about their "own dilemmas" collected in 1976 and 1978, comparison was made in terms of topic and general dilemma type. Using the 51 categories listed in Table 1, only 11 out of 52 subjects gave dilemmas in the same topic area both times. Therefore, not only do subjects give a great diversity of dilemmas, but also the ones that they give are not representative of them for an extended period of time--posing further problems for anyone attempting to identify representative standard dilemmas of young adults. Some ~~indication~~ explanation for this instability comes from incidental comments of the subjects themselves. Several subjects happened to mention that they chose their particular dilemma because of a recent, much-publicized debate in their community. One subject said, "The reason I chose gay rights is due to the recent repeal of the gay rights amendment in St. Paul." In 1978 gay rights was a hotly-debated referendum issue in their community, and the substantial increase in mentioning "gay rights" in 1978 over 1976 reflects the flux of ~~current~~ events. Table 1 indicates the fluctuations of topics from time to time. Similarly, other subjects mentioned that their choice of "own dilemma" was influenced by media publicity given to current events in their community. Probably it is no coincidence that the abortion issue was mentioned by subjects coming from a neighborhood where a highly controversial abortion clinic has been located.

The consistency over two years was also examined in the basic type of dilemma (social issue, personal problem, general pronouncement, or none). 26 out of 52 subjects were consistent in type. The most frequent change in 1978 was to "social issue" dilemmas from some other category in 1976.

Relation of "own dilemmas" to subject characteristics and subjects' milieu. Information was available for each subject on sex, age, P score on the DIT, whether the subject was in college, whether the subject still lived at home with his parents

or had moved out, and whether the subject was married. Given the diversity and instability of the subjects' "own dilemmas," extensive statistical analysis relating this variable to each of the other variables was not appropriate. However, some selected analyses are informative.

On most of the 51 topics of Table 1, the numbers of subjects mentioning that specific topic is too small to conduct meaningful analyses. However, the abortion issue was described in 17 instances, summing across 1976 and 1978. Only four subjects mentioned abortion both in 1976 and 1978 (and since their characteristics could change between 1976 and 1978 except for sex, each instance of mentioning abortion is treated as a separate instance). What kind of subject mentions abortion as their own dilemma? Table 2 presents data on the demographic, developmental, and situational characteristics of subjects giving abortion as their own dilemma. The percentages are the proportion of instances in the whole sample ($n = 104$) who have that characteristic and who mentioned abortion; the numbers in parentheses are the number of instances (from a total of 17 instances). For example, 7 of the 17 subjects who mentioned abortion were in the age group 18-20 years; since there were 26 subjects (combining 1976 and 1978) in the age group 18-20 years, 27% of that group (7 out of 26) who mentioned abortion (and 73% of that age group did not), whereas 13% of the 21-22 year old group mentioned abortion (and 87% did not). Overall, in no instance did a majority of subjects with a certain characteristic mention abortion; and generally strong associations are lacking between these characteristics and the mention of abortion. Interestingly, about the same proportion of males mentioned abortion as females, suggesting that abortion is not distinctively a female concern. Only with regard to "Education" is there suggested a strong difference between those attending college versus those not: only college subjects mentioned abortion as their own dilemma (although 75% did not).

Insert Table 2 about here

More extensive analyses can be performed by grouping the "own dilemmas" into one of four dilemma types ("social issue," "personal problem," "general," and "none"), and relating this information to the subject's age, sex, education, residence, marital status, moral judgment score, and developmental change in moral judgment score from the previous testing. Again, the basic question is, "What kind of subject describes a certain type of moral dilemma in their own life?" The analyses are given in terms of a series of two-way contingency tables in which types of dilemma is one dimension and the other dimension groups subjects in terms of some demographic, developmental or milieu characteristic. In each table data from 1976 and 1979 are pooled for a total of 104 instances.

Insert Table 3 about here

Age does not seem to make much difference in which of the four general types of dilemmas are given. Regarding the sex of subject, females seem to give more social issue and personal problem dilemmas, and males seem to give more general dilemmas. On the basis of the sex role stereotyping literature, one might have expected females to be more personally oriented in describing their own moral dilemmas, but it comes as something of a surprise that females also give proportionally more social issue dilemmas as well. The largest difference, however, is that females give proportionately fewer general dilemmas than males. Regarding education, the subjects in college (or college graduates) give somewhat more social issue dilemmas than personal dilemmas (compared to subjects who are working, in the military, housewives, or not in school and not employed), and this may reflect being in a milieu that emphasizes societal

concerns. The other dimensions of milieu, residence and marital status, do not show striking effects (although it is interesting that none of the married subjects drew a blank in coming up with a moral dilemma). On the developmental variables, giving general dilemmas was marginally related to P scores--perhaps both variables have in common a tendency to approach moral dilemma from a broad, abstract perspectives. All of these trends, however, are preliminary and speculative--preliminary, because the trends are not powerful and their generality is unknown; speculative, because all of our explanations are post-hoc and not corroborated by any other information.

Further analyses were conducted on the education variable. Since an earlier study (Rest, Note 2) had shown that the impact of college was more dramatic after four years than after two years (comparing college students with non-college subjects on a number of developmental variables), the data from subjects with four years of college was contrasted with subjects having no college (using only 1978 data and dropping subjects who had less than four years of college). 48 subjects were in this analysis, 31 in college, 17 non-college. The distributions of these two sub-groups over the four dilemma types was similar to the distributions in Table 3 for education, however, the chi-square trends were somewhat weaker: $\chi^2(3) = 6.63$, $p < .10$. Table 4 shows the distribution of dilemma types when subjects are grouped simultaneously by education (4 years of college or not) and by the DIT's P score (median split into high and low groups). The rationale behind this analysis was that if the four dilemma types do indicate some sort of developmental dimension (e.g., becoming more sociocentric and less egocentric?) then dramatic differences should appear when comparing the college group with high P scores to the non-college group with low P scores.

Insert Table 4 about here

As can be seen in Table 4, the contrasts are not that dramatic, and the chi-square for the contingency table is non-significant (χ^2 with 9 d.f. = 11.18, $p > .10$).

Discussion

The most important findings of the present study are that the moral dilemmas that young adults write about as concerning them in their own lives are extremely diverse and very changeable over time. On the basis of this data it does not seem possible to devise a few standard moral dilemmas which would represent the distinctive moral concerns of young adults and be any less artificial than the dilemmas now used in current experimenter-originated dilemmas. Many of the moral dilemmas written by young adults are similar in topic and basic type to the current experimenter-originated dilemmas (e.g., Kohlberg's test and the DIT), and it is difficult to discern common and stable elements in the other subject-originated dilemmas. Whereas Yussen (1977) found that including dilemmas concerning friendship problems and interpersonal relations would improve the representativeness of dilemmas for adolescents, the older subjects in the present study did not highlight such problems but seemed to be more affected by the vicissitudes of current events and issues receiving media attention.

It may be that a different method of identifying moral dilemmas in the lives of young adults would indicate more commonalities than the method of this study and Yussen's study. The dilemmas that subjects provide upon request has unknown relation to the day by day problems of concern to young adults. Perhaps if these individuals were actually followed around throughout the day and frequently querried about what was on their minds, a different picture would emerge about the moral dilemmas that concern them. One can speculate about various factors that may have distorted the representativenss of the dilemmas that subjects gave in the present study (for instance, subjects were too embarrassed to mention what was really bothering them, peculiar demand characteristics of the testing situation, etc.). But in any case,

the present approach does not seem very promising for generating new standard dilemmas for young adults that can claim to be more representative and less artifical than the current sets.

The problem then remains for linking what is known about moral reasoning elicited by current standardized tests with moral reasoning and decision making in real life contexts (which affect the flow of events in the real world beyond the research context). Several research strategies have already been tried and deserve further exploration. One strategy is to select subjects who are exposed to identifiable moral dilemmas in their professions and work. Crisham (1979) found that nurses are recurrently exposed to certain moral dilemmas as part of their professional responsibility (e.g., disclosure of bad news to patients). By restricting and specializing the population of study, one has a better chance of identifying common moral dilemmas in the lives of the subjects. Another strategy is to focus study on widely publicized events which affect the lives of large numbers of people. For instance, Haan, Smith, and Block (1968) studied the moral reasoning of students to the tumultuous student protest movement that dominated life on the Berkeley campus in 1964, and these researchers plausibly assumed that all Berkeley students would be aware of and have given thought to that situation and what their own stance would be. A third strategy is to create a moral dilemma for a set of subjects through experimental manipulations, and to study moral reasoning, decision-making, and behavior in that context. While this strategy itself raises moral questions for the researcher about subjecting people to this sort of experience, nevertheless various researchers have sensitively and profitably studied both moral reasoning and behavior in experimental settings (e.g., Damon, 1977; Gunzburger, Wegner, & Anooshian, 1977; Jacobs, 1977). Therefore, the disappointing results of the approach in the present study to find new and more representative dilemmas for subjects does not foreclose other possibilities for studying moral reasoning in actual decision-making contexts.

In the present study, subjects seemed to describe their own dilemmas from three general perspectives: some subjects gave dilemmas about social issues (e.g., abortion, gay rights, arms race); some subjects described dilemmas about personal problems (e.g., moving in with my girlfriend, finding a suitable date, trouble at work, being in a bar fight); and some subjects discussed general cause of human conflict and misery (e.g., people are too greedy, governments are too corrupt, the nation is falling away from God).

Each of these perspectives could have been suggested by one or another aspect of the DIT questionnaire which was filled out before subjects described their own dilemma. There was moderate consistency over two years in the type of dilemma described (50% of the subjects were classified in the same type both times). It is not clear that any of the dilemma types is developmentally more advanced than the other since the trends are not consistent: age was not significantly related to dilemma type; subjects with more education tended to give slightly more dilemmas of the social issue type than of the personal problem type, but the DIT's P score was marginally related to the general type. Further analyses on the interaction of education with DIT scores did not support a developmental interpretation of the dilemma types. Interestingly, females not only gave proportionally more personal dilemmas than males, but also gave more social issue dilemmas as well. Males gave proportionally more general dilemmas than females. The major significance of the findings regarding the dilemma types is not to argue for a new developmental dimension in moral thinking, but to describe how subjects respond to a request to write about their own moral dilemmas, and to indicate the complexity of this data.

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Table 1

Descriptions of Subject-Originated Dilemmas and Frequency of Occurrence

	Frequency Time 1	Frequency Time 2	Total Frequency
I. Social Policy Issues			
A. Definition and sanctity of physical life			(21)
1. abortion	8	9	17
2. mercy killing	3	1	4
B. Rights of minorities/underpriviledged groups			(20)
1. gay rights	1	8	9
2. rights of handicapped	0	1	1
3. women's rights: sex stereotyping	0	1	1
4. women's rights: care of rape victims	0	1	1
5. care for elderly	0	1	1
6. rights of racial minorities: housing	1	1	2
7. rights of racial minorities: school integration	2	1	3
8. right to speak out for unpopular cause	1	1	2
C. Other national problems			(8)
1. need for more effective educational system	1	0	1
2. drug and alcohol abuse (as social problem)	1	0	1
3. abuses of welfare system	1	2	3
4. capital punishment	1	0	1
5. lack of employment for college graduates	0	1	1
6. pre-marital sex (as problem of values in society)	1	0	1
D. International problems			(5)
1. arms race; neutron bomb	0	2	2
2. overpopulation in world	1	1	2
3. world food shortage	1	0	1
II. Personal Problems			
A. Dating, marriage, sexual relationships			(14)
1. cohabitating with girlfriend/boyfriend	3	2	5
2. parents approval of boyfriend	1	0	1
3. interfaith dating and marriage	1	1	2
4. "should I marry him?"	0	1	1
5. "should I divorce him/her?"	0	2	2
6. abortion ("if I get pregnant")	1	0	1
7. premarital sex ("dealing with my guilt")	0	1	1
8. "I don't want a role in marriage like my mother's"	1	0	1
B. Problems at work			(4)
1. being fired	1	0	1
2. overbearing supervisor	1	0	1
3. too much responsibility	1	1	2
C. Drugs and alcohol			(4)
1. peer pressure to drink	2	0	2
2. peer pressure to use drugs	2	0	2

Table 1 (continued)

	Frequency Time 1	Frequency Time 2	Total Frequency
D. Reactions to shocking experiences, other problems			(8)
1. witnessing a suicide	1	0	1
2. bar fight	1	0	1
3. medical decision for grandmother	1	0	1
4. car accident	0	1	1
5. cheating in school	0	1	1
6. reaction to surgery	0	1	1
7. TV influences on my children	0	1	1
8. my religious conversion	0	1	1
III. General pronouncements on what's wrong with people, society, or human nature			(21)
1. people are too greedy and hateful, lack trust and compassion	4	1	5
2. people are too apathetic and irresponsible	3	1	4
3. what are our basic values?	1	1	2
4. people are becoming too conservative	1	1	2
5. nation is falling away from God	1	0	1
6. people should be more honest and uninhibited	0	1	1
7. people are destroying the world	1	0	1
8. problem of evil (why human suffering at all?)	1	0	1
9. ineffectiveness and corruption of all government	0	3	3
10. discover source of morality in world by attentiveness, not conscious judgment	0	1	1
IV. "I can't think of any moral dilemma"	3	5	8
			113

Table 2

Characteristics of Subjects Describing Abortion
as their "Own Dilemma"

AGE			SEX			EDUCATION[c]			RESIDENCE		
18-20	27%[a]	(7)[b]	male	13%	(5)	college	25%	(17)	at home	20%	(8)
21-22	13%	(7)	female	19%	(12)	noncollege	0%	(0)	not at home	14%	(9)
23-24	12%	(3)									

Moral Judgment Development

MARITAL STATUS			(P SCORE)[d]			P SCORE CHANGE[e]		
married	7%	(1)	high	22%	(8)	gain	23%	(9)
not married	20%	(18)	medium	14%	(6)	same	12%	(6)
			low	12%	(3)	loss	13%	(7)

NOTES:

a. Percent indicates proportion of the group having that characteristic for the whole sample.

b. Number in parenthesis is number of subjects having that characteristic who mentioned the abortion issue.

c. Subjects who were in college or had graduated from college are designated, "college"; all others are designated "noncollege"

d. P score is the relative importance given to Stages 5 and 6 on the DIT. High P score is 50% and above; medium is 33% to 49%; low is below 33%.

e. P score change is regarded as "gain" if the previous P score was exceeded by more than the standard error of measurement, as "loss" if the previous P score was higher by more than the standard error of measurement, and "same" if the difference between the previous score and the present score does not exceed the standard error of measurement.

Table 3

Characteristics of Subjects Related to General Dilemma Type

AGE: $\chi^2(6) = 3.39$, N.S.

	Social Issue		Personal Problem		General		None	
18-20 yrs. n=26	58%[a]	(15)[b]	31%	(8)	8%	(2)	4%	(1)
21-22 yrs. n=32	44%	(23)	29%	(15)	17%	(9)	10%	(5)
23-24 yrs. n=26	42%	(11)	27%	(7)	23%	(6)	8%	(2)

SEX: $\chi^2(3) = 15.89$, $p < .005$

	Social Issue		Personal Problem		General		None	
male n = 40	35%	(14)	20%	(8)	33%	(13)	13%	(5)
female n = 64	55%	(35)	34%	(22)	6%	(4)	5%	(3)

EDUCATION: $\chi^2(3) = 8.75$; $p \leq .05$

	Social Issue		Personal Problem		General		None	
college[c] (n=67)	55%	(37)	19%	(13)	18%	(12)	7%	(5)
noncollege (n=37)	32%	(12)	46%	(17)	14%	(5)	8%	(3)

RESIDENCE: $\chi^2(3) = .59$, N.S.

	Social Issue		Personal Problem		General		None	
living with parents (n=43)	49%	(21)	26%	(11)	19%	(8)	7%	(3)
not living with parents (n=61)	46%	(28)	31%	(19)	15%	(9)	8%	(5)

MARITAL STATUS: $\chi^2(3) = 3.63$, N. S.

	Social Issue		Personal Problem		General		None	
married (n=20)	40%	(8)	35%	(7)	25%	(5)	0%	(0)
non-married (n=84)	49%	(41)	27%	(23)	14%	(12)	10%	(8)

Table 3 (continued)

MORAL JUDGMENT (P SCORE)[d]: $\chi^2(6) = 10.77$, $p < .10$

	Social Issues		Personal Problem		General		None	
high (n=35)	40%	(14)	26%	(9)	29%	(10)	6%	(2)
medium (n=44)	57%	(25)	23%	(10)	14%	(6)	7%	(3)
low (n=25)	40%	(10)	44%	(11)	4%	(1)	12%	(3)

P SCORE CHANGE[e]: $\chi^2(6) = 6.39$, N.S.

	Social Issues		Personal Problem		General		None	
gain (n=39)	56%	(22)	21%	(8)	13%	(5)	10%	(4)
same (n=48)	44%	(21)	29%	(14)	19%	(9)	8%	(4)
loss (n=17)	35%	(6)	47%	(8)	18%	(3)	0%	(0)

NOTES:

a. Percent indicates proportion of the group giving that type of "own dilemma".
b. Number in parenthesis is number of subjects in that group giving that dilemma type.
c. Subjects who were in college or had graduated from college were designated "college".
d. P score represents Stages 5 and 6. "High" is 50% and above; "Medium" is 33% to 49%; "Low" is 32% or below.
e. Change is defined as a difference in score between two testings exceeding the standard error of measurement of the P score.

Table 4

Dilemma Types Related Simultaneously to Education and Moral Judgment Development (P Score)

	Social Issue		Personal Problem		General		None	
College								
High P score n=19	63%	(12)	11%	(2)	21%	(4)	5%	(1)
Low P score n=12	67%	(8)	8%	(1)	25%	(2)	0%	(0)
Noncollege								
High P score n=8	38%	(3)	38%	(3)	25%	(2)	0%	(0)
Low P score n=9	44%	(4)	44%	(4)	0%	(0)	11%	(1)

NOTES:
See explanations in Table 3.